

The Minister of (name of the health ministry)

(name of the minister)

(address of the ministry)

(date of the letter)

Subject: Towards Ensuring Pandemic Prevention Preparedness And Response

Esteemed Minister,

Following “The World Together” resolution of the second Special Session of the World Health Assembly (WHASS) last year, our union has closely followed and engaged with the processes and discussions of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Body (INB) to draft and negotiate an international agreement for Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response (PPR), supported by Public Services International (PSI), the global trade union federation which we are affiliated to.

We welcome the “Conceptual Zero Draft of the consideration of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Body at its third meeting” which has recently been issued ahead of the third meeting of the INB which commences in Geneva on 5-7 December 2022. However, from the perspective of the health workers we represent, there are some worrisome issues which we bring to you and urge your Ministry to raise during the upcoming phase of negotiations.

We understand that the INB has set the upcoming meeting as the last opportunity to highlight elements that are missing from the Conceptual Zero Draft. We therefore limit ourselves to key elements that are missing from the draft and for which we urge your support in ensuring that they are considered.

With your support, this future instrument will build on the learnings and experience of the health workers that stood at the frontline during the Covid-19 pandemic, so that the lives of our colleagues that were lost in this struggle would not be lost in vain.

INCLUSION OF EXPLICIT PROVISIONS FOR PREVENTION

We are concerned by the lack of inclusion of explicit provisions for prevention. This is a yawning gap in the conceptual zero draft. Without prejudice to the importance of preparedness and required foresight for response, there is no gainsaying the fact that “prevention is better than cure.”

We thus urge you to call for the inclusion of explicit provisions for promoting prevention, as the point of departure for preparedness.

DECENT WORK FOR THE HEALTH & CARE WORKFORCE

The roles that we as health workers played in the COVID-19 response has been applauded by you and world leaders. In this light, we do think that Article 11 of the conceptual zero draft on “strengthening and sustaining a skilled and competent health workforce” is not adequate. Decent work for health workers is a requirement for quality health services and strong health systems. In addition, we have

learned that in a context where we are learning about a virus as we stand with infected or potentially infected patients, the precautionary principle is paramount to protect the health workforce standing at the frontlines.

We urge you to call for the inclusion of:

- Decent work for health workers as well as application of the precautionary principle in policies that affect health workers exposure to risk as two additional principles, under Article 4
- An additional Article under Chapter IV (ideally before current Article 11) that provides for measures to ensure decent work for the health workforce. This is to ensure the explicit inclusion of improved terms and conditions of work, adequate health worker to patient ratios, and the labour rights provided under ILO Convention 149. The current Article 11 tries to address both skills and training, as well as health worker rights, while we believe they need to be addressed separately in order to be addressed adequately.

WAIVER OF IPR ON PANDEMIC PRODUCTS

Many lives would have been saved in the COVID-19 pandemic if intellectual property rights on vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics had been waived. This proposal was backed by more than 100 countries during the debates at WTO. This is a major lesson for the world and we should ensure this situation is avoided in any future pandemic.

We thus urge you to stand up for a legally binding commitment to *time-bound waivers of protection of intellectual property rights on pandemic response products during pandemics* (Art 7.2 a)(iv), as well as include the creation of a *permanent mechanism that would automatically trigger this suspension when a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) is declared*.

FINANCIAL JUSTICE FOR PANDEMIC PPR

Pandemics are primarily global health emergencies. But they snowball into economic crises, in which low- and middle-income countries bear the greatest burden. Prevention of pandemics as well require a global financial architecture which ensures that these countries have enough resources to inject into building strong and resilient universal public health systems.

We are concerned that Chapter VI on Financing is weak in the principles that underlie its articles. We urge you to demand the inclusion of the principle of financial justice, or the application of the principle of equity to financing for pandemic PPR.

We look forward to your support and remain at your disposal if you have any queries.

Sincerely

(union representative)